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MORNING BULLETIN

Southern leaders in Lincoln plot?

In the aftermath of the Civil War, former Confederate leaders may have fought and won a critical "disinformation" campaign to persuade the American people that assassin John Wilkes Booth was a madman acting on his own volition. Reporter Michael J. Bonafield reveals a new Lincoln assassination theory: Conventional history tells us that on April 14, 1865, John Wilkes Booth, distraught over the recent collapse of the Confederacy, assassinated President Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theater. Now, two historians and a former CIA officer say that Booth was part of a larger plot by Confederate leaders to kidnap Mr. Lincoln, blow up the White House, and force the federal government to sue for peace.

David W. Gaddy, a former Defense Department analyst and expert on the Confederate secret service, Civil War historian James O. Hall, and retired Gen. William A. Tidwell, a former CIA officer and an authority on intelligence techniques, held a news conference at Georgetown University Library yesterday to unveil their book, "Come Retribution."

The book, which is near completion, but without a publisher, argues that Booth was merely a cog in a grand Confederate scheme. Unnamed Southern leaders allegedly planned in September 1864 to move Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia out of the Richmond-Petersburg defenses and into North Carolina, where a substantial cache of materiel awaited.

Gen. Lee would then have united with Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's Army of Tennessee. Together they would have defeated the Union forces of Gen. William T. Sherman and then moved against Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and his huge Army of the Potomac for the decisive battle of the war.

Booth's role in this affair was, according to the authors, that of creating a suitable "diversion" in Washington to throw the Union high command into turmoil. Booth shot the president instead of kidnapping him after he learned of Gen. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Va., on April 9, 1865.

— John Elvin